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SUBJECT: COULD THERE BE A SUMMER ELECTION IN CANADA?

Classified By: CDA Terry Breese, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. The Conservatives appear increasingly to favor a summer election, but so far the other opposition parties -- all of whom must vote together to bring down the government -- may not be willing to play along. Usually, summer elections are anathema to Canadian electors, but the Conservatives may be increasingly calculating their own core constituents would be more apt to turn up at the polls even in the summer than would be Liberal or NDP supporters or the increasingly important swing voters. End Summary.

12. (C) In a private luncheon with CDA on May 28, Minister of Heritage James Moore confidently predicted a new federal election "within three weeks," in part as an explanation for why new legislation on intellectual property protection would not go forward in this Parliament. Moore opined that the Conservatives would use the Employment Insurance issue to taunt the three opposition parties -- all of which favor expand of eligibility -- to join together to vote down the government. Conservative MPs have indicated to the media that the Conservatives would allot the remaining required "opposition days" in the House of Commons to the three parties beginning o/a June 17.

13. (C) In a separate lunch with PolMinCouns, new Liberal Party national director Rocco Rossi strongly pooh-poohed the idea of a summer election, and predicted that even a fall election was unlikely. He admitted that the possibility of the government falling in spring 2010 -- after the Winter Olympics -- over its next budget remained strong, however. Rossi explained that the Bloc Quebecois and the New Democratic Party at this point were concerned that they would lose seats in the next election to the resurgent Liberals, and would be especially opposed to an early election. Rossi added that the Liberals also would prefer to avoid an early election in order to give them more time to refill their coffers (he said that he had almost succeeded in retiring all debts from the previous election and before) and to rebuild grassroots party organizations. He noted that Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff very much wanted to spend the summer touring Canada, not only to raise money but also to perfect his future election campaign posture. When asked why, if the Liberals did not want an early election, Ignatieff had recently upped the ante in his taunting of the Conservatives over EI and in denunciations of Finance Minister Jim Flaherty's credibility over the size of the budget deficit, Rossi explained that the Liberal base definitely wanted to hear a stronger leader than the ill-fated previous leader Stephane Dion, and that Ignatieff was playing up to them.

14. (C) Comment: While the Conservatives have some good reasons to wish for an early election, they may find the other parties not willing to play along -- for now. It would appear difficult for the government to propose changes to EI that would be so politically unpalatable to the three opposition parties and yet win them votes in the crucial provinces of Quebec and Ontario, with growing unemployment rates. The government could include changes to EI in the required June budget report, which will be definition by a confidence vote. The Conservatives nonetheless must be

watching with some concern the generally improving poll numbers for the Liberals under Ignatieff, and will want to ensure that they -- not the Liberals -- pick the timing of the next election, yet without appearing as blatantly self-serving -- as they did in triggering the October 2008 election. It will be a tricky political tightrope performance for both the Conservatives and the Liberals over the next months, with the level of drama sure to heighten in June. If the government does not fall, the House of Commons is set to go on the long summer recess no later than June 23.

Usually, summer elections are anathema to Canadian electors -- eager to enjoy their few months of warm weather -- but the Conservatives may be increasingly calculating their own core constituents would be more apt to turn up at the polls even in the summer than would be Liberal or NDP supporters or the increasingly important swing voters.

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